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PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS IN AFGHANISTAN – AN
ARGUMENT FOR OBJECTIVE CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL

by

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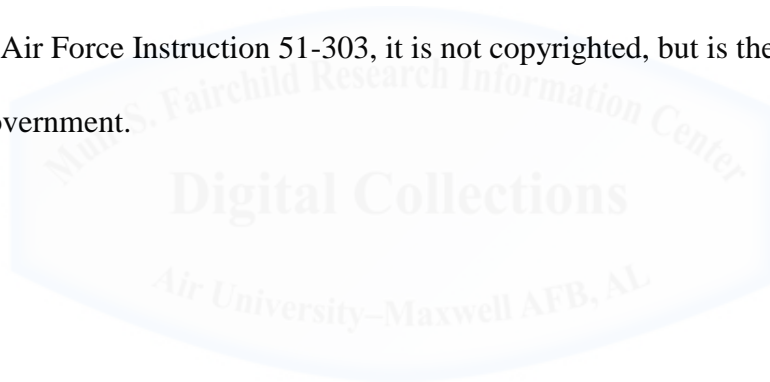
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Abstract

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan provide an interesting example of civil-military relations. Born out of the exigencies of war, PRTs emerged to provide an interim civil-military organization able to stabilize the operational environment in an unstable/insecure province or locality through a combined diplomatic, military, informational and economic capabilities. PRTs, though tactical in effort, provide operational and strategic effects by linking stability and reconstruction efforts to U. S. national and UN/Afghan governmental objectives and priorities. The current PRTs in Afghanistan provide for military lead and control over assigned civilians - the integration and coordination of civil-military efforts in PRTs has been noteworthy. However, military control over an entity whose efforts are linked to USG national strategy and Afghan nation building strains civil-military relations, and usurps the foundational tenet of military subordination to civilian control. It is time to put a civilian face on USG stability and reconstruction efforts to ensure unity of effort/command in linking PRT efforts to USG and Afghan governmental objectives, and reassure the international community that the U.S. military is not 'designing or making' U.S. policy. It is time for objective civilian control of PRTs in Afghanistan.

An interesting entity evolving within the current war in Afghanistan and under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) umbrella is the form and function of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). Instituted in 2002, PRTs primary purpose was to provide “an interim civil-military operations organization that is able to help stabilize the operational environment in an unstable or insecure province or locality through its combined diplomatic, military, informational and economic capabilities.”¹ An underlying causative reason for PRTs, which rarely receives mentioning, encompasses the USG’s interest in spreading the ISAF effect without expanding ISAF itself – a way to maintain a light footprint.² Despite this initial shortsightedness of USG policy concerning PRTs, the current U.S. national strategy in Afghanistan develops lofty expectations and places enormous importance/pressure on the performance and execution of PRTs in supporting a ‘whole of government’ approach.³ The current civil-military construct of the PRTs evolved from operational necessities and availability of ‘assets’ (manpower) – the preponderance of the capabilities are provided by the military, with a smattering of DoS, USAID and other USG officials brought on board as could be provided. Currently, PRTs perform their mission well; however, the ever-increasing convergence of civilian and military operations, a steady increase in U.S. civilian capacity in the PRTs, the need for improved integration and coordination with the Afghan government and NGO’s, and the ever present problem involving unity of effort and command in linking tactical efforts/effects to national strategy strains civil-military relations.⁴ The PRT construct, born out of operational exigencies in 2002, requires a fundamental review of form, function and command and control mechanisms to ensure predictable decision-making and resource sharing that supports national objectives, end-states and political purpose.⁵ The primary purpose of this paper centers on the argument supporting objective civilian control of Afghanistan PRTs, with the rationale and

benefits debated and addressed. A secondary purpose includes a review of corollary issues affected by civilian control of PRTs – specifically; a review of current PRT anatomy/models, funding and doctrine; the NGO perspective of PRTs; a review of the ‘whole of government’ approach; PRT leadership models and mandates; and other recommendations that strengthen the ‘whole of government’ approach. We begin with a brief synopsis of USG efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the PRT’s evolution to strategic significance.

Iraq and Afghanistan: A Current Perspective

For the better part of eight years the USG, coupled with a UN coalition, endeavored to meander through the strategic minefield and moonscape of Afghanistan. The USG/UN strategic security imperatives and objectives for this coalition intervention in 2001, symbolically named OPERATION Enduring Freedom (OEF), were understood – “destruction of terrorists camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.”⁶ The initial short-term success of OEF against the Taliban and al Qaeda was both encouraging and expected; however, these successes should have raised engaged debate, planning and guidance on what the long term political landscape of Afghanistan would or could look like, and to what extent the USG/UN was willing and obligated to invest in ‘fixing what it broke’ in a failing state. Now fast forward to 2003 – the USG/UN pursues an intervention in Iraq, predicatively named OPERATION Iraqi Freedom (OIF) – imperatives and objectives include removing Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.⁷ Again, initial short-term OIF successes were realized; however, engaged debate, planning and guidance for the long term ‘self employed sovereignty’ of Iraq was missing or worse yet, assumed away. Both interventions have evolved into protracted ‘wars’ – wars costing the USG and UN coalition

partners resources, manpower and political capital. Both interventions also highlight a growing disconnect between the transition from kinetic military operations to stability operations, or nation building. The international community (read USG) has a gifted affinity to remember and plan for incremental (short term) successes, and forget the unpredictable and unpleasant nature and costs in resources and human capital associated with strategic nation building (long term). This trend is not new – a review of the Vietnam War should jog the memory. Bluntly, the international community has a problem with recognizing, quantifying and planning for the risks, costs and obligations associated with nation-state interventions and stability operations, especially in those nation-states with failing, corrupt or non-existent governmental infrastructure. The current lack of a long-term, ‘whole of reality’ approach to strategic risks, costs and obligations associated with OEF/OIF interventions is unsupportable from an economic, political and military standpoint. The USG has domestic agenda issues that require a preponderance of national attention and resources. Additionally, the continued political support/will of the US populace and strategic patience of the USG concerning OEF/OIF should not be assumed. A quantifiable strategic conclusion and end-state is necessary – more importantly, what is needed is a U.S. ‘whole of government’ solution that includes the ‘whole of government’.

President Obama’s administration unleashed a new strategy for OEF in December 2009. The new strategy, developed by International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Commander, General McChrystal, engages a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, concentrating on the Afghan populace as the center of gravity.⁸ In full support of this COIN strategy, President Obama responded to the SecDef’s request for additional troops by approving an increase of 30,000 troops along with a substantial increase in civilian and civil service personnel.⁹ These increases

in manpower and resources point to a USG resolve in getting the political, economic and military long-term strategy concerning Afghanistan correct, and bridging the disconnect between kinetic operations and stability operations (PRTs). The advent of a COIN strategy in Afghanistan parallels the 'surge' strategy engineered by General Patreus in Iraq.¹⁰ The cautiously positive results of COIN operations in conjunction with directed stability operations (PRTs) in Iraq underwrite the optimism and expectations in Afghanistan. However, of concern is the idea of templating doctrine and strategy successes in one region/situation with different regional and cultural nuances, into another region.¹¹ COIN and stability operations doctrines for Afghanistan need to stay focused on Afghan issues. As described, PRT's form an integral part of a long-term ISAF strategic strategy in Afghanistan and bridge the gap between kinetic operations and stability operations. The next section will look into the 'whole of government' approach concerning PRTs.

What is a 'Whole of Government' Approach?

The Military 'Whole of Government' Approach. A recent lecturer at ACSC mentioned that the military represented the 'whole of government' in Afghanistan. The statement, which drifted unpretentiously through the auditorium, raised internal anger in the heart and mind of this author - in part by the nonchalant nature of the statement, but more so because the statement was true. The military, because of its capabilities, flexibility and unwavering can-do attitude, is perceived as the predominate hammer in the USG IOP toolbox. The unfortunate part is that every international problem, incident or unresolved crisis the USG encounters resembles a blunt object and is acted upon as if it were a nail. It is invariably true that the military will always be the 'first responder' to international and national crisis/incidents - military capabilities support

these types of contingencies. However, unlike the subordinate assistance provided by the military during U.S. national incidents (DSCA), international events place the primacy of action on the military, who, in the absence of other USG IOPs, develop primary, secondary, and tertiary support mechanisms – in essence, a ‘whole of government’ approach. This is an unsupportable military trend and an indictment of the USG’s lack of commitment to a ‘whole of government’ concept. The PRT leadership issue defines the angst felt by military leadership concerning the lack of a coordinated ‘whole of government’ approach. These issues, and others, are not lost on senior DoD and military leaders. As Secretary of Defense Gates mentions, “The Foreign Service is not the Foreign Legion, and the U.S. military should never be mistaken for a Peace Corps with guns.”¹² Additionally, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen posits, “Use of military forces must be accompanied by other instruments of national and international power...I believe that U.S. foreign policy is still too dominated by the military.”¹³ These statements by senior DOD leaders provide a clear consensus concerning the over-use of the military IOP. With that said, it should come as no surprise that the two most prevalent defense terms in the 2010 QDR are ‘partners’ and ‘allies’.¹⁴

A ‘Whole of Government’ Approach. Army Field Manual 3-07 defines a ‘whole of government approach as an “approach that integrates the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the United States Government to achieve unity of effort toward a shared goal.”¹⁵ The Department of State Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), the DoS entity empowered to lead and coordinate USG response across all agencies, continues to work diligently to support this mandate.¹⁶ Plagued historically by chronic underfunding and understaffing, the S/CRS, through recent dedicated funding, is developing civilian capacity and internal capability to coordinate Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations (SRO). However,

S/CRS must understand its limitations in order to focus on its capabilities. The following issues confront S/CRS; lack of planning and training expertise; lack of logistical/administrative infrastructure; lack of institutional structure; lack of persistent funding; and lack of doctrine and organizational structure.¹⁷ Mitigations exist for each of these issues by leveraging existing capabilities in other USG agencies/departments and through Congressional oversight. These include:

- Planning and training - leverage through the Army Civil-Affairs, National Defense University courses and National War College JPME programs.
- Logistics and administration - leverage the military's existing logistical and administration infrastructure.
- Institutional/organizational structure - FEMA's National Response Frame Work, Incident Command System and National Incident Management System provide off-the-shelf coordinating structures which can be modified and replicated for S/CRS use¹⁸. Additionally; Emergency Support Function (ESF) annexes can provide a framework for developing a USG crosswalk of responsibilities and roles.
- Doctrine - leverage and expand existing doctrine through JFCOM and COCOMs to formulate a joint-interagency doctrine.
- Funding - Congress finally understands the importance of SRO and is funding S/CRS appropriately. However, developing a joint DoD and S/CRS funding stream/mechanism is possible, mutually advantageous, would mitigate funding miscalculations, and preserve unity of effort with appropriated funding concerning SRO.

The point here is that S/CRS does not need to become another USG empire as it develops and matures. Key enablers for S/CRS include collaboration, coordination and a small footprint,

which would mitigate funding issues. Leadership of a PRT does not require a large civilian staff – it requires a well-trained, engaged, focused, and enthusiastic Foreign Service Officer, who can manage and leverage the capacities of the USG, coordinate and link national and international objectives through efforts/tasks, and oversee a large spectrum of stabilization and reconstruction operations. This is a daunting set of responsibilities, but one which deserves and demands DoS leadership.

Issues for Consideration. There exists interesting research concerning S/CRS constructs and doctrine. The following ideas are of mention and deserve continued research: Integrating military and civilian COIN operations into an integrated CONOPS (ICONOPS) doctrine¹⁹; bottom-up SSTR strategy and forming a Field Advance Civilian Team (FACT)²⁰; and the implementation of an Interagency Goldwater-Nichols Act.²¹

The bottom line – a ‘whole of government’ approach requires actual ‘whole of government’ involvement. We will now look at the anatomy of a PRT.

PRT Anatomy, Funding and Doctrine

PRT Anatomy/Model. To date, there are 26 PRT teams in the 34 Afghan provinces – 13 are U.S led, the remaining 13 managed by coalition partners (Britain, Canada, Lithuania, Italy and Germany).²² In Afghanistan, the U.S. PRTs consist of 80 to 100 military personnel, with 3-5 civilian counterparts; led by military commanders, they emphasize impact projects in volatile areas.²³ As a comparison, the U.K. PRTs average 100 military personnel with 30 civilians; led by a civilian, they emphasize local capacity building in volatile areas.²⁴ German PRTs average 400 personnel with 20 civilians; dual leadership between one military and one civilian leader, they emphasize long-term sustainable development, in permissive environments.²⁵ In Iraq, all

U.S. ePRTs (embedded PRTs – embedded within Army BCTs) are civilian led. As shown, a ‘standard’ PRT model does not exist – the construct of a PRT is determined by each UN coalition partner based on provincial needs, locality, security environment, available forces/manpower and funding, and largely, the nationalistic policies towards reconstruction and PRT roles in it.²⁶ ISAF has no oversight on the construct or funding of PRTs – ISAF’s control remains in the military domain only. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is the directive control over reconstruction projects, but does not direct – it advises. What exists is a UN mission consisting of a military/security lead (ISAF) and a reconstruction lead (UNAMA) providing ‘whole of government’ support to the Afghan government and populace through the PRT mechanism, with little directive control. The resulting lack of control and continuity surrounding PRTs ensures problems with strategic coordination of reconstruction projects, and a general confusion on the part of the Afghan government and populace on the range and depth of assistance.²⁷ What needs to exist is UN directive oversight of PRT operations, which includes defining basic PRT constructs and positional requirements, funding requirements, and PRT functional guidelines. As a template, the UK PRT model should be utilized; creditable observers view the UK model as the most effective PRT construct in terms of civil-military coordination, NGO support, and coordination with Afghan and coalition partners.²⁸ Establishing PRT funding and functional guidelines will not be easy – consensus is a luxury rarely achieved during a conflict, especially with so many participants and diverse political agendas. The best advice – charge forward with guidance and oversight – it is better to be 70 percent correct, than 100 percent wrong.

PRT Funding. Of increasing USG internal/external debate concerning PRTs is the availability and execution of appropriated funding streams. The primary program funding

support for PRTs is the Economic Support Funds (ESF), which are managed by numerous entities outside the PRT construct (Local Governance Programs, Provincial Reconstruction Development Councils).²⁹ The USAID Field Officer provides access to Quick Impact Program funds, which support small capacity-building endeavors.³⁰ The Department of State (DoS) funding contribution includes the Quick Reaction Funds (QRF). The military PRT commander has at his/her disposal the most accessible and flexible funding stream – the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP).³¹ Though originally allocated to provide condolence payments, repair property damage from military operations and provide urgent humanitarian/reconstruction needs, CERP funding has evolved into a financial conduit for demonstrating good will and creating favorable local reactions.³² Oversight of PRT funding streams and usage is the subject of increased congressional scrutiny and oversight due in part to both the ease of access (CERP) and restrictions on use (ESF, Quick Impact, QRF) of available funds. The fear, and to some extent the reality, remains that stability/reconstruction project planning is distorted, resulting in projects chosen based on how funds can be spent and accessed rather than actual local needs.³³ The need for increased Congressional fiscal oversight to ensure the funding provided is linked to national and Afghan strategies and priorities is self evident – the issue is who at the PRT level will be made accountable for the execution of appropriated funding. The ‘who’ issue in the PRT is addressed later in this paper.

PRT Doctrine. Currently, definitive joint PRT doctrine remains mostly non-existent – the only mention of PRTs in joint doctrine exists in Joint Publication 3-24, Counterinsurgency Operations (5 October, 2009) – a four page Appendix B. By comparison, Army Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations (October 2008) provides a six page PRT Appendix F. The only PRT instructional information available is courtesy of the ISAF PRT Handbooks and Playbooks,

which are 2006 documents (6th version).³⁴ The lack of definitive PRT doctrine is a problem persistently documented and highlighted in Congressional, USG, UN, NGO, academic journal and think tank (RAND) reports produced on the subject of PRTs. Without definitive joint interagency doctrine, what is the “proper concept, role, and objectives of PRTs?”³⁵

Foundationally, joint doctrine provides guidance on command and control mechanisms and provides a framework for linking strategy to political purpose.³⁶ The lack of PRT joint-interagency doctrine reduces the effectiveness of PRT operations, and adds to a perceived ‘ad hoc’ nature of stability and reconstruction operations. The growing complexities of PRT operations and civil-military relations demand definitive guidance and purpose. A well-defined joint-interagency PRT doctrine developed within DoD’s stability, security, transition and reconstruction (SSTR) and DoS’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) constructs is necessary to provide unity of command and effort.

PRT Leadership: Mandates vs Realities

Who Should Lead? An on-going debate exists on who should lead PRT teams in Afghanistan. There should be no such debate – the answer exists in established U.S. public law and military doctrine. National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 44 provides the overarching guidance on the “management of interagency efforts concerning stabilization and reconstruction.”³⁷ To execute this directive, NSPD 44 empowered the Secretary of State to lead and coordinate the USG response across all agencies.³⁸ As further clarification, in 2008 President Bush signed into law the Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act (Title 16 of Public Law 110-417) which “**charged** the State Department with **leading** the interagency effort...and to create a civilian counterpart to the U.S. military that is ready and able

to assist countries in the transition from conflict.”³⁹ As further evidence, the scant military doctrine that exists on PRTs addresses the leadership issue; JP 3-24 Counterinsurgency notes, “The PRT leader is normally a DoS official, but may be a DoD Official”⁴⁰ – Army FM 3-07 posits, “The Team leader is a senior U.S. Foreign Service Officer.”⁴¹ The mandate and guidance on who should lead PRT teams is clear and unambiguous – PRTs should be lead by DoS personnel. The reality is that Afghanistan PRTs are lead/run by military commanders – the reasons for military leadership are reasonable, but out-dated. First, as developed in the opening, the military encompassed the preponderance of leadership capability during the development of initial PRT’s. Second, the DoS’s ability to generate the requisite number of qualified Foreign Service Officers developed slowly, leading to a ‘capacity gap’. Third, the military was accustomed, along with the Afghan government and populace, to executing the humanitarian and reconstruction tasks and projects associated with stabilization operations. Lastly, the existing UN ISAF control mechanism made it easy to install a military lead in PRTs – this enabled a modicum of control over reconstruction and stability operations. As stated, these are reasonable arguments, but no longer valid. The military maintains a preponderance of the capabilities required for PRT support as directed by Department of Defense Instruction 3000.05⁴²; however, the military no longer has national level authority or a mandate to lead reconstruction and stability operations.⁴³ Additionally, DoS’s ability to deploy qualified Foreign Service Officers has greatly improved, allowing for the assignment of qualified Foreign Service Officers to Afghan PRTs.⁴⁴ Lastly, and most importantly, the over reliance of the Afghan government and populace on the military to provide assistance is a dangerous trend that effects the legitimacy of the Afghan government, U.S. national strategic objectives and complicates the ability of NGOs

to provide needed, non-partisan assistance.⁴⁵ The requirement for civilian leadership of Afghan PRTs is well established.

Civil-Military Leadership Models. Due in part to the seemingly perpetual SSTR efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there exist good literature and discussion concerning the issue of civil-military relations and integration. One posit provided by Navy LT Joshua Welle in the latest edition of *Joint Force Quarterly* is to institute a multinational dual-role civil-military leadership command and control (C2) structure within ISAF, encompassing the national, regional, provincial (PRTs) and district levels.⁴⁶ This ‘co-equal’ civilian-military C2 structure is similar to Douglas Bland’s theory of shared responsibility mentioned in his essay *A Unified Theory of Civil-Military Relations*. The common thread in both perspectives is the civil-military ‘sharing of control and responsibility’ and the inherent professionalism and unity of effort and purpose of both to mitigate over-control of the other. Additionally, Patrick Cronin in his Strategic Forum essay *Irregular Warfare; New Challenges for Civil-Military Relations* speaks eloquently to “integrating civil-military relationships”⁴⁷ through the management of relations and strategic patience. A shared control/responsibility construct for civil-military relations is an option in providing needed security, augmenting civilian capacity, or providing short term effects in supporting USG missions. However, over the long-term, “PRTs with a larger civilian presence tend to balance the military, political and development priorities more effectively than those with a very small civilian presence.”⁴⁸ As emphasized by Galula, “giving the soldier authority over the civilian would thus contradict one of the major characteristics of this type of war (COIN).”⁴⁹ Putting a civilian face and control on the USG strategic and political end-state, especially in the PRTs, represents a linkage of U.S. national strategic and Afghan government

objectives/priorities through ‘the last tactical mile’, providing a ‘logical line of operations’ in a whole of government approach.

NGO Perspective. NGOs have issues with PRTs. Simply put, “while PRTs are related to humanitarian efforts, unlike NGO and UN relief organizations, they seek to achieve the political ends of the sponsoring government.”⁵⁰ Another issue surrounds the blurring of civilian and military roles and the encroachment of the military on the ‘humanitarian space’ of the NGOs.⁵¹ NGOs contend that the military lacks the expertise for humanitarian work, jeopardizes the neutrality of NGOs, and “exacerbates the targeting of civilian aid workers.”⁵² If the NGOs had to pick a PRT to work with, it would be the U.K. PRT construct. The British engaged NGOs in developing their PRT construct, understanding the importance of NGO and Afghan capacities in the transition of reconstruction efforts. This provides a good lesson learned for U.S. PRTs, and highlights the importance of civilian leadership – NGOs prefer to work with civilian leadership; they provide a buffer that protects NGO principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.⁵³

Rationale for Civilian Control. The rationale for civilian control of PRTs is purposefully placed at the end of this paper – in doing so, the strategic, operational and tactical benefits of civilian control of PRTs can be linked directly to the issues addressed in the previous sections. Objective civilian control of PRTs will:

- Provide direct linkage of U. S. national strategic and Afghan government objectives and priorities to PRT efforts – ‘the last tactical mile’.
- Reduce the perception of a ‘militarized’ U.S. foreign policy
- Provide a single point of responsibility/accountability for PRT funding execution
- Provide cogent advice/input on PRT measures of effectiveness which link to national strategic objectives, as opposed to tactical measures of performance.

- Provide a civilian face on USG reconstruction/stability operations to coalition, Afghan and IGO/NGO partners.
- Develop groundwork for PRT transition to Afghan government, and an exit strategy for U.S. military forces (which is currently non-existent).
- Demonstrates a U. S. ‘whole of government’ commitment and fulfills the DoS mandate to lead stability and reconstruction operations.
- Define future PRT models, roles and responsibilities.
- Inform joint and interagency SSTR and S/CRS doctrine

Recommendations

Reflecting on primary arguments provided, the following recommendations are proffered concerning PRT leadership in Afghanistan:

1. Transition PRT leadership to civilian control, to include cognizant responsibility and appropriate accountability over funding stream execution. Funding oversight is essential with leadership transition - the agency that controls funding heavily influences PRT priorities.⁵⁴ This should be a joint S/CRS and DoD effort.
2. Develop definitive joint-interagency doctrine/guidance within the S/CRS and SSTR construct that outlines civilian and military roles/functions, organizational structures and objectives for PRTs. S/CRS should take the lead in this effort.
3. Review current PRT construct with an emphasis on incorporating/integrating an increased civilian footprint (both USG and Afghan). Utilize the U.K. PRT model as a

template. This should be a joint S/CRS and DoD effort, in coordination with the UN (ISAF and UNAMA).

Conclusion

Military subordination to civilian control is a bedrock tenet of our U.S. Constitution.⁵⁵ Perceiving a threat to liberty and freedom, the ‘framers’ painstakingly structured and ratified constitutional language that delineated civilian control over “fatal instruments to overturn public liberties”⁵⁶ – standing armies. ‘Objective civilian control’ over the military, a concept developed by Samuel P Huntington, is the ultimate goal of a state regarding civil-military relations. Simply defined, “objective civilian control achieves its end by militarizing the military, making them the tool of the state.”⁵⁷ The PRT’s in Afghanistan, for lack of a better definition, function as ‘tools’ of the USG. To borrow a Clausewitzian theme, “if war...is an extension of politics by other means, so too is relief and reconstruction an extension of political, economic and military strategy,”⁵⁸ The foundational tenet of military subordination to civilian control does not have caveats – the exigencies of war should never provide a means for the military to usurp civilian control. Civilian leadership and control of PRTs is critical in supporting the USG’s national strategy, and dispelling the perception that “the U.S. military has developed a tendency to design and make policy.”⁵⁹ Future civil-military missions will entail the military taking on additional tasks and capacities that lie outside what is considered military purview – these additional tasks/capacities should never be construed as permanent, authoritative, unilateral, or without civilian oversight and control.

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